DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 348 752 EA 024 219

AUTHOR George, Paul
TITLE How To Untrack Your School.
INSTITUTION Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, Va.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-87120-196-8
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 53p.
AVAILABLE FROM Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1250 N. Pitt Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-1403 (Stock No. 611-92135; $6.95).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Ability Grouping; *Change Strategies; *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; *Institutional Mission; *Nontraditional Education; *Track System (Education)
IDENTIFIERS *Inclusive Educational Programs

ABSTRACT

Educators increasingly agree that creating more inclusive schools by eliminating rigid ability grouping is important to improving education; this task will take years of study, persuasion, and staff development. This booklet is designed to assist school leaders desiring to study the issue, persuade others of its correctness, and create learning experiences that ease the transition to more inclusive schools. Four chapters define the tasks involved in moving away from ability grouping. First, educators must envision the inclusive school and share this vision with staff members, board members, and patrons. The vision emerges from studying ability grouping problems involved in determining student placement, locking students in or out; denying the importance of effort; undermining self-esteem; questioning achievement goals; isolating groups negatively; destroying sense of community; creating inequities; and skirting illegalities. Third, educators must develop viable, acceptable alternatives, such as fair ability grouping, partial untracking, Joplin plans (the practice of grouping students for specific skills across grade levels), teacher autonomy, before- and after-school programs, split-level grouping, and other approaches. Finally, educators must prepare a long-term plan, secure widespread involvement, conduct a local self-study, disseminate information, and plan appropriate staff development. The booklet concludes with a list of 48 references, 26 contact persons, and 16 organizations. (MLH)

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How to Untrack Your School

Paul George

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ASCD Stock No.: 611-92135

$6.95

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

George, Paul S.
How to untrack your school / Paul George.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references (p.).
ISBN 0-87120-196-8 : $6.95
1. Track system (Education) 2. Educational equalization—United States. 3. Educational change—United States. I. Title.
LB3061.8.G46 1992
371.2'54'0973—dc20 92-23897
CIP

How to Untrack Your School

Introduction v

1. Inclusive Schools: Understanding the Vision 1

2. Taking a Look at Ability Grouping 5

3. Examining Alternatives 15

4. Planning Implementation 25

References and Resources 36

Author's note

I AM INTERESTED IN CONTACTING PRACTITIONERS WHO ARE INVOLVED in innovative efforts to provide alternatives to current grouping practices. I invite interested readers to contact me, Paul George, at 2410 Norman Hall, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611 (telephone: 904-392-2391).

Introduction

> Of all the vulgar modes of escaping from the consideration of the effect of social and moral influence on the human mind, the most vulgar is that of attributing the diversities of conduct and character to inherent natural differences.
>
> —John Stuart Mill
> *Principles of Political Economy*

WHEN ASKED WHAT SINGLE CHANGE WOULD BRING HIGHER STUDENT achievement in our schools, Michael McCaffrey, superintendent of the Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District, South Yarmouth, Massachusetts, responded "the virtual elimination of ability-grouped classes and the promotion of heterogeneity" (*ASCD Update*, January 1992, p.7). Admitting that the elimination of ability grouping would require years of "study and persuasion in almost every school district," McCaffrey, nevertheless, insisted that educators "must never give up trying to teach the most important things to all our students, no matter how difficult or inefficient that might be."

Increasingly, educators agree with McCaffrey in two crucial ways: Creating more inclusive schools by eliminating rigid ability grouping is important to improving education; and the task will take years of study, persuasion, and staff development. This book is designed to assist school leaders who, having reached similar conclusions, seek to study the issue, persuade others of its importance and correctness, and create the learning experiences for staff members and parents that will ease the transition to more inclusive schools.

The following chapters define the tasks involved in moving away from ability grouping. First, educators must envision the inclusive school, one in which all students are deemed worthy and capable of learning everything the school has to teach and in which all students feel like

important parts of the group. The vision emerges from studying what research and experience tell us about ability grouping and articulating a convincing case for diversity. Second, educators must develop viable, acceptable alternatives; we cannot simply eliminate ability grouping. Successful alternatives should be characterized by fairness and challenge, with equity and excellence equally available to all learners. Third, successful change strategies take care, time, patience, and skill. As McCaffrey says, ability grouping has been with us for nearly a century; its effective elimination will not be accomplished overnight. Finally, I list the names and addresses of a few pioneering practitioners and other important resources that may prove useful.

1. Inclusive Schools: Understanding the Vision

Develop a personal/professional vision of an inclusive school and how it differs from ability grouping. Share your vision with staff members, parents, board members, and patrons.

STOP! MOVE CAUTIOUSLY AT THE BEGINNING. MANY EDUCATORS prefer action to reflection once they have identified a problem, but to act precipitously at the beginning could jeopardize the entire project. Already, too many teachers have been preemptively cast into mandated heterogeneous grouping and instruction without three important requirements—the commitment, the confidence, and the competence to accomplish the effort. Too many parents have been asked to accept a transition when they have not been given the information to help them understand and support the changes. With alarm, they view teachers' attempts to implement a system neither they nor the teachers can comfortably support. Implementing such drastic changes requires that all the people involved and affected understand where the changes are taking them, what the changes are, and why it is necessary to make the changes.

Inclusive Schools: Building a Common Vision

Educators leading the changes must understand the issues involved with ability grouping and be able to explain

them to their staff members, parents, board members, and others. To make a successful transition, school leaders must be able to articulate clearly and convincingly the goals of inclusive schools and offer a synthesis of the deficiencies of ability grouping, followed by suggestions of viable alternatives. This proactive leadership, as defined by Covey (1989) and others, is essential.

Building Consensus: Three Common Goals

Consensus on the vision and purpose of an inclusive school can be reached by reaffirming three central goals for your school. First, reassert firmly that *the school's primary goal is, and always has been, learning.* This is what separates schools from other institutions, such as the home, corporations, or the military. Furthermore, acknowledge that school learning, unlike learning in other institutions, must rely on standardized tests and other objective measures to determine academic achievement. Reassure others that, for better or worse, academic achievement is your school's number one goal and that you would never support any change that would compromise that goal. Reassure others that you believe, as do all educators, that all students who come to your school, including the best and the brightest, must be challenged to learn as much as they are capable of learning.

Second, remind others that *schools have always had a second goal: To protect and provide for students' personal development as they move through school.* Academic achievement at the cost of personal development has never been acceptable in our schools. Schools should contribute positively and consciously to the personal development of all students. Whenever possible, students should learn in ways that make them feel better about themselves and their capacity to learn. If possible, students should be taught using methods that produce academic achievement and, at the same time, improve their abilities to work more effectively with others. Students focus on the primary goal of academic achievement, but educators can choose methods that not only help them learn but also teach them to listen carefully and to work with others in the pursuit of common goals.

The third goal may seem less important than the first two, but it is crucial in our increasingly diverse society. Schools and classrooms need to operate in ways that encourage students to see themselves as members of the same team, threads in a common national fabric, multicolored and multitextured though it may be. *Schools are obligated to encourage group citizenship.* Education should move students toward a greater sense of community in and out of school. Students must be taught that no one is more equal than others, that we are all important parts of the whole. They must internalize concepts like duty, responsibility, loyalty, obligation, and involvement. In a word, they must learn citizenship while they learn academics. Some of this can be taught, but much of it students learn through their experiences with others in the school setting. By seeing that no one receives more than his fair share of the learning resources, students learn that citizenship includes all people and does not isolate others by handicap, race, ethnicity, gender, or income. Children learn what they live, and if the leaders of tomorrow are to lead us well, they must experience the basic tenets of citizenship as they learn their academics.

Recent studies of Japanese schools confirm the importance of this third goal. The Japanese believe in national unity and the cooperative spirit. They also believe that Japanese school children are at a unique point of readiness to learn group citizenship and the attendant concepts of loyalty, harmony, duty, and obligation. They organize their schools to take advantage of this readiness. For example, in the Japanese junior high school, nearly ten hours of every week are devoted to homeroom time (George 1989). The homeroom time is used to build a sense of community, group spirit, loyalty to one's peers, and the feeling of being a part of the group. The Japanese believe that by following these goals, students will become adults who see themselves as important members of a great national family of equals, capable of working together with a minimum of interpersonal friction and a maximum of group harmony. We see daily evidence that affirms the validity and success of their insight.

Although we may not wish to become Japanese, it would be foolish to ignore what they have accomplished and not adapt some of their ideas. If we are to survive and

flourish in the 21st century, we must help students learn the lessons necessary to establish a sense of community that holds us all together in a great national fabric that is not torn and frayed by discord, division, misunderstanding, or hatred.

This means that schools must not organize in ways that discriminate or isolate, even if the result is higher academic achievement for a small group. No school should tolerate organizational arrangements that build on or contribute to the belief that some students are better than others, or that some students are so different from others that they cannot effectively live and learn in classrooms together. Those who advocate such structures should be challenged to prove that the results will be positive for all.

Educators seeking support to move away from ability grouping must be able to articulate these three goals—academic achievement, personal development, and group citizenship. Although change is difficult, it is possible and the results will be worth the effort. Once school leaders have developed and shared their vision for an inclusive school, subsequent untracking tasks will become easier.

2.
Taking a Look at Ability Grouping

Using research and experience, be prepared to define the problems engendered by ability grouping.

BEYOND DEVELOPING A COMMON VISION, SCHOOL LEADERS NEED TO help others understand why a change is necessary. They must explain the negative evidence that has accumulated from research and experience with regard to rigid ability grouping, often called tracking. In discussions and presentations to individuals, small groups, and larger audiences, school leaders should point out the flaws of ability grouping and provide information that favors a more inclusive school approach. School leaders can safely refer to these ten points to support the need for change.

Determining Accurate Placement

The fair and accurate identification and placement of students into ability groups is far more difficult to accomplish than was once thought to be the case. Jeannie Oakes (1985) identified serious deficiencies in the process used by most schools. Too often test score differences that are used for grouping practices do not reflect significant differences in students' intelligence or achievement. For example, in Florida a student who achieves a score of 130 on an IQ test is classified as gifted, and a student who scores 129 is not. The absolute amount of intelligence represented by a test score difference of one point is infinitessimally small, but huge differences in educational opportunities and experiences are accorded to students on the basis of that one point.

In 1990, the National Commission on Testing and Public Policy, financed by the Ford Foundation and chaired by Bernard R. Gifford, vice president of Apple Computers, concluded that the standardized testing used for grouping "often results in unfairness in the allocation of educational opportunities, lacks adequate public accountability, too often undermines vital social policies, harms minorities and hinders school reform, and uses too much time and distorts the educational process." Other standardized tests, such as the SAT, have also come under scrutiny for purported weaknesses that favor students of one gender or socioeconomic status.

Most experienced educators would agree that group placement is often influenced by socioeconomic status or parents' political clout. Children from poverty backgrounds often lack the spirited advocacy of parents who understand the importance of group placement, who have the time to make their wishes known, and who have the status to secure their child's placement. Many parents do not understand the difference one teacher or class can make. Also, they may live fifteen miles from the school and not have a car to go there, or they may not be able to take time off from their jobs to go to the school to investigate their child's placement. They may be intimidated by majority culture or by better-educated individuals in positions of professional importance. They may defer to the judgment of others when it may not be in the best interest of their children. Or, tragically, they may not care about the education of their children. For whatever reason, children do not share equal advocacy, and some inevitably end up in a group or track that is detrimental to their needs.

Regardless of which placement methods they use, schools with substantially diverse student populations often place poor and minority students in the lower track or ability groups in numbers that exceed their representation in the school population as a whole. When we accept this situation, we are saying that poor and minority students are by their nature or experience less able to achieve than more affluent and majority culture students. Such a situation cannot be tolerated in a society that remains dedicated to the proposition that all children can learn what the school has to teach.

Becoming Locked In/Locked Out

Once placed in a group, it increasingly appears that students are unlikely to be moved to a faster group. They become "locked in or locked out." In a comprehensive review of grouping in the middle grades, Dentzer and Wheelock (1990) found this to be so common that they chose those words as the title of their manuscript. Twenty years ago in a benchmark study, the anthropologist Rist (1970) painted an abysmal picture of the meager data teachers used to group students and how long those group placements remained intact. I believe that the experience of most public school educators squares with this documentation. Once placed in low groups, students fall further behind, making movement out of such groups virtually impossible. Placing students in ability groups in the early elementary years virtually guarantees the continuation of those placements through the end of high school.

Denying the Importance of Effort

One of the flaws of ability grouping is that it unnecessarily downplays the importance of the effort put forth by students, teachers, and parents, and unjustifiably emphasizes the centrality of the individual student's ability. In comparing other countries' grouping methods and academic achievement with those of the United States, we find significant differences (George 1989, Stevenson and Lee 1990). For example, parents and teachers in Japan and Taiwan attribute student and school success or failure to inadequate effort. When students do poorly, they are exhorted to "gambare," work harder, persist, and "endure with effort." Slower students must simply try harder. No one expects them to be removed from the classroom for special intervention or to ease the way for faster students. To date, Japanese schools do not have ability grouping prior to 10th grade. Many Japanese educators think it foolish to remove the best students, models of hard work and high achievement, from the classroom.

Japanese and Taiwanese parents and teachers appear to believe that all children can learn at least the minimum of what the school expects. Japanese psychologists believe

that the widely publicized ten point superiority in Japanese students' IQ scores over Americans has nothing to do with differences in innate ability. They believe that it results from Japanese children being taught early on to persist in difficult situations, to keep at a problem until they get the answer. Consequently, when their students take intelligence tests, they simply work harder at getting the answers.

Ironically, American parents express more satisfaction with their schools than do either Japanese or Taiwanese parents, but their children achieve less academically. This yields a fascinating paradox: The parents of the most successful students are least satisfied with the school experience of their children; the parents of the least successful students (Americans) express the most satisfaction with their children's school experience (Stevenson and Lee 1990). American parents also seem to believe that they have less responsibility for the success of their children's learning experiences than do parents in Asia, and see less need for hard work on their part in helping their children achieve.

The term "ability grouping" implies that students are expected to learn at different rates. Most educators now recognize the power of expectations on the effort and success of both teachers and learners (Brophy 1979). With good reason, we should worry that ability grouping lowers both expectations and effort and results in lower achievement for some.

Affecting Self-Esteem

Ability grouping seems to be related to substantial differences in student self-esteem. High-track students have considerably higher educational aspirations and more positive academic and personal self-concepts. Students in low-track classes are not so much critical of school as they are of their own abilities (Oakes 1985). During the early elementary years, academic self-concept is at its peak, declining in subsequent years. The decline accelerates for less successful learners who are assigned to low-track classes (Marsh 1989). Thus, ability grouping falls short of our obligation to help students develop and maintain positive self-perceptions.

Questioning Achievement Goals

Academic achievement does not appear to improve with ability grouping. Most research on ability grouping focuses on academic achievement. The conclusions we draw depend on which research we read, which researchers we respect, and which groups of students we're focusing on. Proponents of different positions make copies of their favorite research reviews and disseminate them widely. In this area, disagreements will probably become more heated. Slavin (1990) concludes that ability grouping has little or no effect on achievement—that all forms of ability grouping are equally ineffective in all subjects. Kulik and Kulik (1991) argue that ability grouping does deliver favorable outcomes to gifted and talented learners.

After reading analyses of Slavin (1987, 1990), Noland and Taylor (1986), Oakes (1985, 1990, 1992), Gamoran and Berends (1987), Rogers (1991), Kulik and Kulik (1984, 1991, Kulik 1992), and many others, I believe that, except for situations in which students receive the very best learning situations a school can offer, ability grouping fails to deliver increased academic achievement. When advanced students are grouped together for acceleration and provided with the best teachers, the best learning climate, the most enriched curriculum, and state-of-the-art instruction and learning resources, they learn more than they otherwise would. Who wouldn't? Under these circumstances, it is clearly not grouping that delivers the benefits, but resources.

Isolating Groups Negatively

Ability grouping may lead to racial, ethnic, and income isolation. Even if tracking produced higher academic achievement and higher self-esteem for most students—which it doesn't—it is an undesirable and unacceptable educational practice if it leads to separation and isolation of students according to racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic attributes. In many schools and districts, grouping results in an over-representation of poor and minority group children in the lower tracks, and the majority culture, higher-income children in the higher tracks. Tracking effectively isolates these children from one another, at

times resulting in racial segregation, a negative outcome for all (Metz 1983, Oakes 1985, 1992).

Destroying the Sense of Community

Ability grouping may contribute to the destruction of a sense of community in the school and outside. When student grouping results in isolation by factors that resemble the same separations found in the society, it is not unreasonable to fear the fraying of the community fabric. As students pass the years organized in ways that separate them, they become polarized into pro- and anti-school camps that become increasingly estranged from one another (Gamoran and Berends 1987, p. 426). One group achieves success in the classroom; the other finds success in the hallways and playgrounds. Even more unfortunate, such attitudes may harden into peer group norms that lead to alienation, vandalism, violence, and misunderstandings, which can develop into lifelong prejudices. In our increasingly multicultural and pluralistic society, these consequences can be disastrous.

Creating Inequities

Grouping may deliver the school's learning resources in fundamentally unfair and inequitable ways. Compared to the so-called average or standard classes, class sizes of advanced and remedial sections are generally smaller. The status attached to membership in advanced classes is incontestably high, and the status in basic and remedial sections is low. In advanced groups, time on task is higher and the learning climate is positive, with appropriately high expectations for success. One need only recall the television comedy featuring the "Sweat Hogs" to realize how difficult teaching becomes when the class represents a critical mass of discouragement.

The essential inequity of ability grouping as it is often practiced is the way it may extend to the assignment of teachers. In many schools, assigning teachers is as much a political process as a pedagogical one. With few levels of professional advancement available, one of the ways principals can reward their more successful teachers is to assign them the students they prefer (Darling-Hammond

1988). Both evidence and experience suggest that teachers strongly prefer to teach advanced classes. In one study, only 3 percent of the teachers expressed an interest in teaching low-ability groups (Findley and Bryan 1975). Charged with motivating their teaching staff, many school principals assign the best teachers to the best students and the least successful or unproven and inexperienced teachers to the students who need the most help.

All too often, the desire to reward teachers combines with the need to pacify politically powerful or complaining parents. When parents request that their students have specific teachers, principals tend to be receptive and try to accommodate them. These parents understand the difference one teacher can make and are not intimidated about contacting the school principal to make such a request.

Whatever the reasons, students who are perceived as having less potential for successful learning are often grouped together with teachers who have not established a record of success or who are simply less experienced.

In addition, innovative, state-of-the-art instruction seems to be distributed inequitably among classes with different ability groups. Teachers perceive high-ability, high-achieving students as more receptive to unusual and creative teaching techniques. They feel they can take instructional risks with such students because classroom management is less of a problem. For discouraged learners, high-risk strategies are often discarded in favor of learning methods that keep students still and quiet, lest they get out of control (Cooper 1979).

Students in advanced classes are also exposed to a more enriched curriculum than students in other sections. Their books, assignments, and classroom discussions differ in richness and robustness. Students in advanced classes are perceived as being "able to handle it." Oakes summarizes:

> It appears, however, that only the most extraordinary average and low-level classes match the curriculum standards, learning opportunities, and classroom climates of even ordinary high-track classes (1988, p. 43).

Because advanced students tend to come from more affluent homes, they bring more enriched life experiences to the classroom. For example, I recently spent the week before Christmas vacation substituting for a 7th grade English teacher. Her five classes differed dramatically in terms of academic success and socioeconomic status. I was responsible for teaching Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. In the four advanced classes, a number of students had been to London and many had seen a local theater production several times. When we acted the play in these classes, many came dressed in period costumes. By contrast, the students in the basic class had little idea of where England was and what its connection was to the literature they were being asked to read. For that matter, most had never been out of their own town. However, they could understand being poor and cold in winter and having few gifts to share with one another at Christmas. I'm sure a better teacher could have taught them important lessons from *A Christmas Carol*, but I confess that I could not. If I had had six months, I could have infused our time together with meaning and achievement, but to tell the truth, I gave up by Wednesday and had them draw and color Tiny Tim's Christmas dinner instead.

I once overheard an elementary school teacher remark, "I have three science classes, but only one counts." Are any of us that different from that teacher? I fear not. Discouraged students grouped together in low-track classes resent their status, respond defensively, and refuse to engage in the very academic efforts that might bring them more success. Teachers, accurately perceiving students' hostility, frequently respond in ways that actually increase the force of those factors. Good and Brophy summarize:

> Even if teachers assigned to low-track classes do not have undesirable attitudes and expectations, they will find it difficult to establish effective learning environments in these classes because of the defeatism, alienation, and flat-out resistance they are likely to encounter there (1987, p. 407).

Jeannie Oakes (1985) made it clear that the hidden aspects of the curriculum are also distributed unfairly. The implicit curriculum in advanced classes seems to be a

curriculum of taking control, of leadership, of learning to be more active. Students learn to take charge of their learning lives, to exercise choice, and to manage their own learning—they learn to manage themselves and others. By contrast, students in basic classes are taught to be more passive, to give up control, to be quiet, punctual, clean, and orderly. The hidden curriculum in the lower tracks prepares students for minimum-wage labor opportunities, for supervision, and even, sadly, for incarceration.

Skirting Illegalities

Some ability grouping practices may actually be illegal. Grouping patterns that are based on or contribute to situations described earlier have been found to be illegal (Bryson and Bentley 1980). The courts have found that the use of standardized tests that results in racially identifiable classes is illegal. Their rulings prohibit public labeling and potential stigmatizing of students by ability. When ability groups result in racially discriminatory situations, the courts place the burden of proof on school officials to prove that the practice has merit and does not inappropriately discriminate.

To be legally acceptable, grouping strategies must use nondiscriminatory standards for identification and placement of students, evaluate students regularly to determine the effectiveness of the strategies, and be discontinued or changed if they are shown to be flawed. All parents must be informed of the potential outcomes of specific placements for their children. Groups must not be permanent on a daily or yearly basis, and students must be able to change groups without being discouraged by penalties or extra work. Grouping strategies must clearly relate to instructional objectives being pursued in the classes. Few ability grouping practices in today's schools would be able to meet this burden of proof.

Ensuring Equal Opportunity

All students, including gifted and talented students, deserve to receive effective instruction in a challenging

curriculum. No group or individual student should be expected to sacrifice the chance for an excellent education so that others might do better. Education must not become a zero sum game in which certain students achieve well at the expense of others' learning. We must find ways for able achievers to do their best in the context of an inclusive school that is characterized by diversity and heterogeneity. We must find ways for at-risk students to achieve without jeopardizing the learning of others. Failure to meet these goals results not only in the inability of the school to achieve its mission, it also ruptures social relationships in ways that will further divide and defeat our society.

What can be said for certain about these complex issues? While the answers from research and professional and personal experiences may take time, I think practitioners can safely say, amidst all the confusion and contradictory claims, that heterogeneous grouping is the preferred choice because it:

- Provides a democratic learning environment.
- Avoids the problems with identification, placement, and rigidity associated with ability grouping.
- Does not label low achievers.
- Prepares learners for real-life situations by involving students with others whose race, culture, ethnicity, social class, or income may be different from their own.
- Helps students learn from their peers.
- Makes teachers unlikely to assume that all students have the same instructional and social needs.
- Prevents in-school segregation on the basis of socioeconomic status, race, gender, or ethnicity.
- Provides students with equal access to the excellent curriculum and spirited instruction from which all can benefit.
- Emphasizes effort more than ability.
- Has never been declared illegal.

Those who propose different arrangements should bear the burden of proving that those arrangements will not remove the benefits of heterogeneous grouping or violate the rights of the individual student.

3.
Examining Alternatives

Examine the available alternatives: adapt, modify, and adopt existing options to fit your own school.

THE GOOD NEWS THAT MUST BE CONVEYED TO THOSE CONCERNED about ending ability grouping is that alternatives exist now that will permit the emergence of inclusive classrooms and schools. Courageous practitioners are exploring options and strategies that will enable change to move forward. Many schools and districts have already moved away from rigid ability grouping.

During the 1989-91 school years, I made a number of presentations on the topic of tracking and between-class ability grouping at local, state, and national meetings. In discussions at each of these sessions, practitioners identified and discussed the alternatives they were using successfully. In addition, I visited schools and communicated with other educators who were involved in what appeared to be a successful departure from rigid ability grouping. Currently, more than a dozen options and alternatives are being practiced in schools around the nation. Most appear to be congruent with research on tracking and ability grouping. Others seem promising and deserve to be implemented on a trial basis.

Fair Ability Grouping

A number of practitioners who are familiar with the research on ability grouping and who have experienced its implementation believe that the practice itself is logical and reasonable, but that it is especially vulnerable to misuse. Thus, it follows that eliminating the abuses would permit

ability grouping to be used more equitably and effectively. In districts in which it may be politically difficult or financially impossible to eliminate ability grouping, this approach offers some options. The question then becomes, how can ability grouping be done fairly? Slavin and others suggest that to ensure equity in ability grouping, these conditions should prevail:

- Students should spend most of their day in heterogeneous situations, being grouped only in specific skill areas that might benefit from a sharp focus, such as reading or mathematics.
- Grouped classes should be shaped on the basis of specific skills, not just on the basis of IQ or overall achievement, and selection procedures should be frequently re-examined.
- Frequent reassessment of student placement should receive high priority.
- Flexible reassignment should be easy to accomplish.
- Instruction should vary by pace and level to fit the real needs of the students in the groups.
- The number of ability groups within a class should be small.
- Every effort should be made to reduce the isolation of identifiable groups of students from the mainstream of the school.
- School leaders need to observe the roots of tracking in the early grades, especially within-class ability grouping and the results of nonpromotion in those grades. Within-class ability grouping—for example, a teacher may work with three reading groups—may lead to differences in learning that grow greater each day, since high groups move faster than lower groups. In such circumstances, students become locked in to specific levels. By the end of elementary school, students in the top and bottom groups may be separated by as many as four full grade-years in math and six grade levels in reading. These groups also influence friendship and peer groups, which can influence motivation, aspirations, and performance. Nonpromotion has immediate effects with long-term influences on the fairness of ability grouping. Nonpromotion has not been proven to deliver any academic achievement benefits and is suspected of creating a subculture of discouragement and negative social and emotional adjustment.

• The unfair advantages—e.g., teacher assignment and racial and social class loading—that have evolved as part of ability grouping should be eliminated.

Partial Untracking

It may be politically unwise, pedagogically difficult, or possibly illegal to dismantle current grouping arrangements in many schools. State and national regulations may demand that certain student populations be served in narrowly prescribed patterns. Parents may exert intense pressure to maintain the status quo. However, ways do exist to eliminate some grouping.

If students are grouped in five levels per subject and in five academic subjects, cut the number of levels or subjects to two or three. If pressure from parents and teachers of students in gifted, honors, and advanced classes makes it impossible to eliminate those sections, don't touch them. Rather than fighting endless, costly battles to eliminate all tracking and ability grouping, cut back where it is easiest. Make a case to eliminate the lowest sections or eliminate grouping totally in classes where the subject matter is anything but hierarchical. Eliminating a substantial degree of tracking may also be the path of greatest fairness, since the final truth is not known on ability grouping, especially for the gifted and in subjects like mathematics and foreign language.

Joplin Plans

The practice of grouping students for specific skills across grade levels, often called the Joplin Plan after the city of its origin, appears to accomplish two goals: Instructional groups seem more manageable in terms of achievement ranges, and it mitigates the worst effects of traditional ability grouping. Several examples exist.

For a decade (1972-1982), a middle school faculty in Florida engaged in what they defined as "multi-age grouping." Students joined one of six interdisciplinary teams in the school. They remained on the teams for the three years they attended the school. Each team consisted

of five teachers—specialists in reading, language arts, science, mathematics, and social studies—and approximately 150 students, 50 each from the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. Teams were mirror images of the school population and community, heterogeneous in all ways: age, race, sex, achievement, and neighborhood.

Every spring, one-third of the team's students moved up to the 9th grade; each fall a new group of 6th graders joined each team. Teachers and students knew each other and worked together in learning situations for three years instead of the customary nine months. A wholly different sense of community developed.

Grouping strategies followed the Joplin Plan. Students were grouped by achievement and skill level in reading or math or both without regard for grade level. A math class might have ten 6th graders, seven 7th graders, and five 8th graders, or some other combination. By using this method, teachers accommodated a narrower range of ability levels and thus were free to use more large-group, teacher-directed instruction. The grouping and regrouping of students depended entirely on their individual progress.

A variety of academic benefits resulted from such organization. The three-year team made student diagnosis and placement a more data-based process. Home-school connections became firm early and grew more positive as the years passed. Peer relationships were far more positive than school demographics would have anticipated. And time on task was achieved quickly and maintained more easily.

The arrangement's advantages were so clear to the faculty and administration that when other school board decisions rendered multi-age grouping impossible, the entire faculty protested. Everyone implored the board to make a policy exception that would allow them to continue multi-age grouping. When their pleas were unsuccessful, they reorganized themselves into modified version of the three-year team, using a student-teacher progression (STP) in which grade level teams would stay together for three years. The STP organization remains in place today and is being adopted by numerous middle schools.

Elementary schools as well have successfully implemented similar designs. The Success for All program establishes a model for reform of urban education that

includes a substantial measure of Joplin-style school organization (Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Livermon, and Dolan 1990). Children in inner-city elementary schools are grouped for reading across grade levels 1, 2, and 3. Students spend most of their day in grade-level heterogeneous classes, but are grouped in reading by skill level, regardless of grade. Once again, this grouping allows teachers to use more teacher-directed, large-group instruction.

Joplin-plan organizational strategies that combine with effective efforts to develop a real sense of community through team and school-within-school operations seem to offer a great deal to elementary and middle level schools. The feasibility for their use at high schools is not as evident.

Teacher Autonomy

Many practitioners report that when they are unable to develop a consensus among the faculty for a major move away from ability grouping, they empower individual and small groups of teachers who are receptive to the concept. In effect, their grouping policy states that in their school all students will be taught in instructional configurations that their teachers determine are the best for them.

This opens a number of possibilities, depending on the school level. In elementary school, teachers in self-contained classrooms can modify the degree of heterogeneity within learning groups. Small groups of teachers working as a grade level group can do the same for students they have in common. At the middle school level, teachers on interdisciplinary teams can agree to group students in a number of ways—for reading and math, or reading only, math only, all academic subjects, or no ability grouping whatsoever. The strategies they choose need not affect other teachers. Although I am unable to cite current examples at the secondary level, I suggest that individual departments assess whether they need ability levels or consider more flexible approaches.

Before and After School

Many school programs are shifting funding for remedial programs away from the official school day to early morning, late afternoon, and Saturday sessions. They

combine this adjustment with the elimination of compensatory or other bottom-rung basic sections that are questionable in their effectiveness.

The effect of these changes has yet to be determined, but the Japanese, with their emphasis on effort rather than ability, have found this approach effective (George 1989). In Japanese schools students who are behind are encouraged to enroll in mostly private, after-school, remedial and acceleration programs called "juku."

Split-level Grouping (Winchester Plan)

By organizing to both maintain and minimize ability grouping, many schools attempt to get the best of both educational worlds. Although I have encountered this plan elsewhere, I first became aware of it in the small, forward-looking school district of Winchester, Kentucky.

Winchester's Conkwright Middle School is organized into grade-level teams of about 125 students each (see Figure 4.1). All students on a team are placed into one of five ability levels: low (K,H), low average (W,T), average (C,R), high average (N,G), and high (O,I). Each group is further subdivided into two groups of 12 or 13 students, yielding ten ability groups, two at each level. To avoid labeling, each group is assigned a letter code. This grouping arrangement makes it easier to assign to teachers students from all five levels over the course of a day, but never more than two levels in one class period. For example, the students in the math teacher's first period class come from the average (C) and low average (W) groups.

More important, students travel with a group of peers of similar abilities but do not spend the whole day with any one ability group. Note that throughout the day, students from the C group are assigned to classes that include members from high average (G,N), high (O), or the other average group (R).

The greatest homogeneity occurs in hierarchical subjects. No teacher endures an unreasonable achievement range, and most groups are probably more homogeneous than necessary. Depending on your goals, it is possible to inject more mixture in the grouping. Teachers and administrators using this process believe it has been effective.

FIGURE 4.1
Conkwright Middle School Split-Level Plan

Subjects

CLASS PERIODS

	MATH	ENGLISH	READING	SOCIAL STUDIES	SCIENCE
1	C,W	R,T	O,I	N,G	K,H
2	ELECTIVE CLASSES/PLANNING				
3	N,G	O,I	K,H	C,R	W,T
4	LUNCH				
5	TEAM PLANNING				
6	K,R	N,C	W,T	O,H	I,G
7	O,I	K,H	C,G	W,T	N,R
8	T,H	W,G	N,R	I,K	C,O

Ability Level Codes, two equal groups per level:
Low = K,H; Low average = W,T; Average = C,R; High average = N,G; High = O,I

Administrative or Student Choice

A number of schools permit students to alter their placement for less formal reasons. This practice allows students to choose their own levels or sections. Expanding this practice could alleviate many of the negatives of tracking.

Administrators at all levels also engage in "administrative placement"—sometimes due to parental request, other times as the result of intuition regarding a particular student's abilities. Administrators and teachers may identify students whom they consider to be "good bets." These students may not have the test scores but they have the right attitude and seem capable of success in a more advanced section or group.

Administrative placement can be used to alter racial and ethnic balances in classrooms. By selecting and supporting particular minority group students, administrators can correct imbalances in all-majority culture classrooms. In a school of 1,000 students, identifying 50 students for administrative reassignment significantly changes the composition of high-level classes. Such reassignments are almost always successful, I am told, particularly if students are matched with a supportive teacher-mentor.

Repackaging the Curriculum

One middle school administrator solved the honors math conundrum by requiring all students to take regular grade-level mathematics. Honors mathematics was placed on the exploratory wheel and could be chosen by students as a second math class. Interested students took two periods of math a day, not an unpopular option with parents.

Jeanne Oakes (1988) recommends that high schools consider minor changes in curriculum design. Low-track math classes could become prerequisites for higher-track classes. Ninth grade mathematics could precede algebra one. One-year college prep courses could be offered in three semesters, two years, or stretched out over the summer for students without the necessary background. Oakes also argues that high schools could eliminate one or more levels

in a subject. If tracking exists, high school counselors must recruit students for enrollment in high-track classes rather than applying arbitrary criteria to keep them out.

Many elementary schools implement an integrated approach to curriculum that fits classroom diversity more comfortably. Thematic and interdisciplinary work, with corresponding student choices, fits well with introducing greater heterogeneity into elementary classrooms.

Consulting and Co-Teaching

Consultation and co-teaching have proven effective for practitioners in many districts. Teachers of exceptional children and those in general education collaborate to provide opportunities for exceptional students and their regular classroom peers to share instructional settings. In consultation, the general education teacher consults with and is regularly coached by the teacher of exceptional children. In co-teaching, the two teachers work together in the same classroom with a heterogeneous group of students. Practitioners report increasing satisfaction with such efforts. Despite their optimism, educators experienced in using these procedures caution that they work only when they are voluntary, when careful training is a prerequisite, and when adequate common planning time is available.

As a consequence of the mainstreaming movement, the consultation and co-teaching models focus primarily on students with learning disabilities. However, educators are discovering that the two models can work equally well when gifted and talented students are the focus. Little should prevent regular classroom teachers and teachers of the gifted from working together, and as long as their needs continue to be met, moving gifted and talented students back into the regular classroom should help resolve the inequities and inefficiencies of rigid tracking and ability grouping.

Pilot Programs

In every school a sizable number of teachers are willing to try anything they believe will improve their program. These same teachers usually possess the energy, dedication, and effectiveness to be successful at whatever

they attempt. Consequently, school leaders encourage individual teachers and small groups of teachers to pilot heterogeneous grouping in one or more parts of a school.

In successful pilot programs benchmark data are gathered for later comparisons. After seeing the data and hearing positive teacher responses, reluctant teachers can be persuaded to make the change because the opinions of professional peers carry more weight than virtually anything else. Reluctant parents and others will be reassured when they see data that include positive student responses, higher achievement scores, fewer behavior problems, and positive interaction between majority and minority culture students.

In classic force field analysis, successful change comes from the removal of forces opposing the change. The primary barriers to untracking are ignorance of the research, the reasonable apprehensions of stakeholders, a lack of alternatives in which practitioners have confidence, and the absence of effective staff development for implementing proposed alternatives. Our examination of the strategies and alternatives suggested by practitioners indicates that a natural force field exists. The key to implementing inclusive schools is to realign those force fields.

4. Planning Implementation

Plan the implementation of an inclusive school carefully, comprehensively, and collaboratively.

CHANGING TO A MORE INCLUSIVE SCHOOL, WHAT OAKES AND LIPTON (1992) refer to as a "culture of detracking," requires careful, comprehensive planning and collaboration. Practitioners experienced in the change process know that attempts to implement change by administrative fiat are usually unsuccessful. Haste damages both credibility and effectiveness. Neither teachers nor parents will be properly prepared for the change, and the result could be failure. Both teachers and parents want the best for their students and must be helped to see that a more inclusive school is a way to go. Furthermore, most teachers have little training in handling heterogeneous classrooms.

School leaders, especially principals, will be heavily pressured from all sides. Some parents and teachers will want to scuttle the plan, and others will encourage faster movement. The central office will expect everything to be done with a minimum of disruption and an absence of controversy. To succeed takes both competence and careful planning in the right political and pedagogical climate.

Moving to a more inclusive school is not simply a reorganization of who learns with whom, and it can be very expensive. Creating a climate for change means pulling together research and experience and disseminating data effectively. These efforts are minimal compared to the cost of preparing the faculty to implement effective heterogeneous instruction with confidence and competence. The necessary staff development requires time and money.

We also cannot ignore the existence of racial, ethnic, and social class prejudices and their connection to the changes we advocate. Research clearly defines the role that prejudice plays in influencing how schools are organized (MacLeod 1987). In districts and communities where ability grouping has served as a proxy of racial and social class segregation, attempts to change may meet anger and hostility. This will be particularly true in districts with a bimodal population, that is, significant numbers of poor, minority children with equivalent numbers of upper-middle-class, high-achieving, majority culture students. This is not a blanket accusation of anyone who opposes changing tracking and ability grouping; but it is true that racial, ethnic, and social class prejudice have influenced the ability grouping issue in some communities.

It is also important to ensure that any school reorganization will continue to meet the legitimate needs of gifted and talented students—not just for political expediency but because these students also have educational needs that deserve to be met. We cannot expect parents, including those of gifted and talented students, to be willing to sacrifice their child's learning opportunities on the altar of social experimentation or educational innovation. Because they are a vocal group who can be very supportive, it is wise to involve parents of gifted and talented students in the change process. Once they are reassured that their children's needs will be met, they can be a valuable resource in achieving equity and excellence for all students.

Reorganization creates potential scheduling difficulties. It is one thing to conceive of an inclusive school. It is another to implement it. However, heterogeneous grouping could actually make scheduling easier in some schools.

Considering all the problems and pitfalls, practitioners experienced in implementing this change and others offer these suggestions to ease the process and ensure a smoother transition.

Prepare a Long-term Plan

The grouping process has been deeply embedded in our schools for generations, and it is unlikely that it will disappear on its own. To bring about such a change

demands comprehensive strategic planning that establishes the desired goal for reorganization, identifies the tactics required for success, and employs the necessary action plan (Pfeiffer, Goodstein, and Nolan 1989). Implementing an effective plan will probably require several years.

Unilateral and impulsive actions by school leaders to end tracking could result in angry parents and frustrated teachers and end, ultimately, in failure.

Secure Widespread Involvement

Educational change of any sort is at least partially political. In the case of tracking and ability grouping, it is very political. Attempts to build a consensus on sensitive issues can be eased by making all stakeholders—those affected by the change—part of the change process.

In particular, two groups of parents need to be part of this change: those who believe that the current situation benefits their children, and those who believe that it is inequitable. The first group must be reassured that their children's educational experience and prospects for admission to good colleges and professions will not be damaged. The second set of parents must learn the importance of class placements and peer group influences to their children's success. They must be willing to speak out against what they believe to be unjust and unfair practices and be encouraged to insist on equity in the assignment of students, teachers, and school resources. It's also wise to acquaint policy making school board members with the research that points out the unfairness and inequity created by ability grouping.

Practitioners who have untracked successfully have frequently set up a task force or steering committee comprised of educators, parents, community members, and school board representatives. Once they become informed participants, these groups usually become committed advocates. From the beginning, school district planners in Ann Arbor, Michigan, were careful to include key parents, teachers, and others who might have negative feelings about the suggested changes. Their participation was balanced by the involvement of parents of poor and minority group children who were minimally involved in

other school change efforts. Sixty-two persons participated in the task force that eventually led to a successful transition.

Conduct a Local Self-Study

Practitioners say that research based on national studies alone is unlikely to convince local professionals, parents, and policymakers. Although necessary and a good beginning, national research needs to be reinforced by a study of the impact of grouping practices in your local schools. The study should focus on children and situations personally known to those who will read the findings. In his study, Harry Martin, principal at Riverview Middle School in Maryland, sought answers to these questions:

- How careful are we in the way we place students in ability-grouped classes? Do we rely on a single measure? Do we use student behavior as an important criterion? Are all parents informed about the placement of their students in sufficient time for them to explore the ramifications? Can we be confident that students are placed accurately and fairly?
- What are the results of our identification and placement processes? Are the high-track classes populated primarily by students from higher income homes? Are minority group children under-represented in high-track classes, or over-represented in low-track classes?
- What are the results in terms of academic achievement? Can we say with confidence that the results are not skewed in terms of ethnic group or family income? That is, do we have an effective school in the sense that no identifiable groups of students can be predicted to have either generally lower or higher academic achievement? Are the ranges of higher academic achievement the almost exclusive province of majority culture, upper-middle-class children? Are the bottom levels of achievement populated by children from predominantly lower income and minority cultures?
- How flexible are our grouping strategies? How much mobility do our plans permit, from day to day, and from year to year? Do students spend most of the day, most of the year, and most of their school tenure in one ability group?

• How does the current situation affect students' perceptions of themselves? Do high-track students have an advantage in terms of self-concept? Might positive self-perceptions of high-track students be unjustifiably inflated, leading to an unreasonable sort of elitism? Do low-track students feel good about themselves and about school?

• How do high-track and low-track students feel about school and about each other? Is there a sense of community in the school such that students all enjoy being here and being together? Do members of different ethnic and income groups evaluate school and each other positively? Is there a substantial amount of voluntary integration in terms of seating in classes and elsewhere, choice of friends, and so on?

• Is there a relationship between track placement and student behavior in school? For example, do most discipline referrals come from the lower track students? Most of the suspensions? Do high-track students represent most of the participation in extracurricular activities of an academic nature?

• How do teachers respond to the current arrangements? Does faculty support for maintaining ability grouping come primarily from teachers assigned to high-track classes? Are such assignments made fairly? That is, do all teachers share in the teaching of both high- and low-track groups? Is the teaching "talent" in the school dispersed evenly over all ability groups? Given an opportunity, would most teachers honestly prefer to teach high-track classes?

• Do teachers actually prepare different lessons for different ability groups, or do both groups get the same content with substantially different expectations for mastery? Do teachers actually use different instructional strategies with high- and low- track classes, or are both groups expected to learn the same way?

• Does parental support of and involvement in school programs come from a broad spectrum of the school population, or is it primarily a middle-class, middle-income phenomenon?

If most of your answers to these questions result in a positive evaluation of the current school organization, untracking may not be necessary. However, if the results call the current situation into question, the data are likely to

be much more persuasive than the results of national studies referenced by an outside consultant.

Most likely, the data will confirm the need to change. In Ann Arbor, findings confirmed the task force members' worst fears about racial isolation, "locked in/locked out" placements, faulty identification and placement methods, behavior problems, and teacher preference.

Disseminate Information Thoroughly

To accept such a change, the community needs to be convinced of the need for change. It is important to disseminate widely the results of both national and local research that clarify the negative effects of ability grouping and give the stakeholders time to process the information. Well-educated, upper-middle-class parents who are committed to fairness can become valuable allies, particularly when they realize that their own children's educational excellence will not suffer as a result of their commitment to equity.

One principal used one-on-one sessions with parents and policymakers. First he allowed the concerned visitors to fully express their concerns. Next he asked them, "Do your concerns come from intuition or knowledge?" Inevitably, they responded "intuition." He followed with: "I'm using knowledge. Here are some of the resources and information I've been consulting. Please take it with you and read it carefully. Then let's talk again." According to this principal, no one ever requested a follow-up. Replacing intuition, self-interest, or bias with data will almost always ease the way for change.

The wisdom in John Dewey's remark, "What the best and wisest parents want for their children, that must the community want for all its children" holds true. It is the responsibility of the change-oriented practitioner to ensure that board members and others have the information they need to make reasoned, balanced decisions and that they do not rely on intuition or hearsay.

Begin at the Beginning

Many practitioners have experienced the greatest success in changing to heterogeneous grouping by starting

with the lower grades in a school or district. Thinking of changing the patterns in the whole district? Begin with the 1st grade in an elementary school. In a 6-8 middle level school, start in the 6th grade; in a 7-9 junior high school, start with the 7th grade. In high school, begin with the 9th or 10th grade. Whether valid or not, there does seem to be a reasonable bit of folk wisdom involved. My own experiences square with this advice.

Plan Appropriate Staff Development

To prepare teachers to deal with heterogeneous grouping requires staff development that is carefully designed, effectively planned, and comprehensive. It must also be conducted prior to and following the changes. Those who will be expected to implement the proposed changes in the way students are grouped in a school or district must be competent and feel confident. Although it is essential to include teachers in the research and decision making, it is not enough. Practitioners suggest several important components to staff development programs that successfully prepare teachers for heterogeneous classrooms. Teachers must have:

- The opportunity to think through the philosophical rationale that supports more flexibility in grouping.
- A chance to study both the national and local research and to understand the moral issues involved.
- The chance to become acquainted with the skills required to become effective in managing and instructing such classes.
- The training and assistance necessary for applying the required strategies of effective classroom behavior management.
- The chance to develop the techniques for giving in-class assistance to less successful students and for challenging more successful students.
- Alternative models of grading that emphasize individual progress and de-emphasize the normal curve concept.
- Knowledge of techniques for providing choice and diversity in homework and major assignments.

Every district has teachers who are or could quickly become effective in heterogeneous classrooms; staff development cadres can be comprised of these effective professionals. An inexpensive source of staff development in schools and school districts can often be found among the special education teachers who can provide training to general education teachers in how to make learning more concrete, how to do alternative assessment, and how to manage a diverse classroom.

These additional areas are important components of a comprehensive staff development program for moving away from rigid ability grouping:

- Understanding and challenging the gifted child in the regular classroom.
- Reaching the at-risk learner in the context of the regular classroom.
- Developing multicultural sensitivity; helping teachers see student differences as assets that strengthen the whole school by providing a learning context that reflects the diversity of the larger world.
- Using alternative assessment and reporting strategies that accommodate diverse classrooms—for example, portfolio-based assessment.
- Studying research, such as TESA (Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement), on teacher expectations and strategies for responding to those expectations.
- Encouraging organizational strategies such as interdisciplinary team organization and teacher-advisory programs that have proven valuable in similar situations.

Also, certain teaching methodologies seem to fit inclusive classrooms well. They include:

- *Cooperative learning.* Most models of cooperative learning have solid research support. However, they are neither simple nor easily learned in one-shot workshops. Training in effective cooperative learning requires more than a workshop.
- *Mastery learning.* Two decades of research and practice support several models of this method. See, for example, the work of Tom Guskey at the University of Kentucky.

• *Whole language, thematic curriculum, and workshop approaches to reading and writing instruction.* Promising departures from rigid basal programs that bring new measures of excitement to students involved in self-chosen reading and writing projects also fit naturally into heterogeneous classrooms. I am particularly familiar and highly impressed with the reading/writing workshop approach associated with the work of Atwell (1987).

• *Individualized instruction*, especially old-fashioned approaches like learning centers or stations and what used to be called "unipacs" may find new life in heterogeneous classrooms.

• *Consultation and co-teaching* approaches to collaboration between regular classroom teachers and special educators, although promising, require willing participants with time for the planning and learning how to work together.

• *Computerized instruction* offers substantial opportunities to diversify instruction in heterogeneous classrooms, but the evidence clearly points out that computers may contribute even more to the lack of access to important learning resources and inequitable learning experiences, especially if only one track of students participates. If the advantages of affluent homes and the presence of computers in those homes is not balanced by access in the school, computerized instruction will have the same class-based inequities as other learning experiences.

On a temporary basis, some school leaders, less confident of being able to design and deliver adequate staff development but feeling a sense of urgency to do something, follow this approach. They say to their teachers, "Just do your best. I know there's only so much you can do with the slower students, and I won't expect you to accomplish miracles." I believe this advice is based on the assumption that slower students moved out of basic or compensatory classes and integrated into higher sections will probably do no worse and might do better than they would have done in the lower level sections. The school leader's words are meant to encourage and reassure anxious teachers until staff development is more available.

Conclusion: The Need for Improvement

Without a doubt, all grouping strategies, diverse and uniform, should improve with more rigorous and careful identification procedures. Whether or not the school or district grouping strategies are amended, we can all agree on the need for examination and evaluation of these procedures.

Because of the nature and vulnerability of standardized instruments, many educators are reluctant to place students in any program on the basis of only one test or evaluation. In other schools, placement procedures carefully avoid placing students in low sections because of the classroom behavior they then exhibit. In still others, educators take pains to explain the potential ramifications of placement to parents prior to actually finalizing the process.

It seems that the move away from ability grouping has only begun, and the strategies that lead to success are now emerging. Studious attention to what works in the education change process in general and in specific situations involving ability grouping will pay off. In the meantime, experiences in Highland Park, Texas, and Ann Arbor, Michigan, along with other districts, suggest these general steps for enacting change:

1. Identify key individuals to coordinate the grouping improvement process.
2. Establish a community-school task force on instructional grouping.
3. Review research findings and legal decisions.
4. Conduct a local school/district self-study.
5. Make recommendations for new grouping practices, perhaps targeting certain aspects of grouping practices for special emphasis, and submit these recommendations to the school board for its approval.
6. Disseminate a board-approved policy statement on instructional grouping.
7. Adopt a multi-year action plan to implement improved instructional grouping practices.
8. Conduct districtwide and school-based staff development for school and classroom leaders, parents, and others.

9. Implement the plan, monitor progress in doing so, and provide assistance where necessary.

10. Assess the new practices and renew efforts to move toward greater equity and excellence.

References and Resources

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The following list of references present what I believe is a balanced perspective on the topic of ability grouping. Some of these works are research, some reflections, some methodologies. Some of the authors make spirited arguments in favor of more inclusive classrooms, while others are very much opposed to eliminating ability grouping or represent focused advocacy of the needs of a particular group, most often gifted and talented learners. I believe that school leaders should make all the relevant literature available to all interested parties. Ultimately, educators must make up their own minds about the practice of ability grouping and what must be done about it. First, we must all examine the literature independently.

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RESOURCES

This section includes only a few of the people and places to which educators interested in getting off the track, successfully, might turn for advice, support, and assistance. This list is far from complete, and I apologize to the hundreds of other unlisted yet equally important people and institutions who might serve as resources. I invite them to contact me so that I can continue to develop a comprehensive list of such resources. I also hope that practitioners who know of other resources will inform me of them.

People

Kathy Barwin
A classroom teacher who is skilled in staff development for the nuts and bolts of the heterogeneous classroom. (18 Pleasant Street, Bristol, VT 05443. Telephone: 802-388-3114.)

Peg Beecher
A teacher/trainer with special expertise in strategies for challenging the gifted student in the regular classroom. (Consultant, National Research Center for the Gifted and Talented, 1943 Asylum Avenue, West Hartford, CT 06117. Telephone: 203-233-1234.)

Bill Breakey
A teacher with unusual expertise in mastery learning and staff development experience related to that topic. (1180 Sherman Hill Road, N.W., Poulsbo, WA 98370. Telephone: 206-697-3276.)

Neila Connors
An excellent keynote speaker capable of focusing on the issues involved in grouping. (Positive Connections, 5166 Woodlane Circle, Tallahassee, FL 32303. Telephone: 904-562-1959.)

Jane Denton
Instrumental in Saginaw high schools moving away from tracking. (Teaching Coordinator, Staff Development Center, 505 Ottawa, Saginaw, MI 48602. Telephone: 517-797-4855.)

Patty De Young
With Doreen Poupard-Tice and Ron Williamson, DeYoung helped move Ann Arbor toward the successful adoption of a new and inclusive school model for the district. (Administrative Projects, Ann Arbor Public Schools, 2725B Boardwalk, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104. Telephone: 313-994-1695.)

Larry Dolan
Deeply involved in the Success for All program, an effective model of the inclusive elementary and middle school. (Center for Research on Effective Schooling, Johns Hopkins University, 3505 North Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218. Telephone: 301-338-8249.)

Dudley E. Flood
Talented keynote speaker who can focus on what really is important for the inclusive school. (P.O. Box 1629, Raleigh, NC 27602. Telephone: 919-828-1426.)

Cecil Floyd
Initiated and completed a transition to heterogeneous classrooms in a very difficult community situation. Has the experience to go with the common sense. (Principal, McCulloch Middle School, 3520 Normandy, Dallas, TX 75205. Telephone: 214-521-0786.)

Jenny Harrison
A math teacher who pioneered the transition to heterogeneous grouping in her own classroom with assistance from no one and can show others how to do the same. (Fort Clarke Middle School, 9301 Northwest 23rd Avenue, Gainesville, FL 32606. Telephone: 904-332-8050.)

Berenda Haskew
A staff member and trainer for Talents Unlimited, an approach to bringing creativity and thinking skills into the regular classroom. (1107 Arlington Street, Mobile, AL 36605. Telephone: 205-690-8060.)

Diane Jackson
Certified staff developer and trainer in the area of "Efficacy Training" and approach to working with at-risk students supported by substantial action-research in Detroit. (Detroit Public Schools, 5057 Woodward, Room 816, Detroit, MI 48202. Telphone: 313-494-0396.)

Linda Kramer-Schlosser
A consultant for the College Board, involved in exciting developments in the area of Advanced Placement Programs as they fit into a more inclusive school. (69 Shoreham Drive, Rochester, NY 14618.)

Sharon Lewis
A staff developer who focuses on practical, nuts-and-bolts strategies for more inclusive classrooms. (National Resource Center for Middle Grades, College of Education, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL 33620. Telephone: 813-974-2530 and 813-493-3437.)

Bertram L. Linder
Has largely, reorganized one of Queen's best and most diverse high schools into a heterogeneous model, with positive academic results. (Principal, Benjamin Cardozo High School, 57-00 223rd Street, Bayside, NY 11364.)

Harry Martin
Principal who guided his middle school away from ability grouping. (Riverview Middle School, 207 Lockerman Street, Denton, MD 21629. Telephone: 301-479-2760.)

Evrett Masters, Roger Genest, Susan Currier, John Lepore
High school practitioners who made heterogeneous grouping happen at the high school level. (Pioneer Valley Regional School, F. Sumner Turner Drive, Northfield, Mass 01360. Telephone: 413-498-2931, FAX 413-498-5928.)

Nancy Peck
Interested in many facets of ability grouping and is willing to coordinate a national network of others who are equally involved. (Southeastern Desegregation Assistance Center, Kendall One Plaza, 8603 S. Dixie Highway, Suite 304, Miami, FL 33143. Telephone: 305-669-0114.)

Marilyn Rethwisch
Teacher in a heterogeneous 2nd grade classroom for 22 years. (Route 1, Wayne, NE 68787. Telephone: work 402-286-4465, home 402-375-2443.)

Carol Schlicter
Developer of Talents Unlimited, Schlicter is an advocate for the gifted also interested in the heterogeneous classroom. (University of Alabama, Box 870231, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0231. Telephone: 205-348-7340.)

Mary Jo Sherman
Experienced middle school reading teacher with expertise in heterogeneous teaching, plus interdisciplinary team organization, and the credentials and persuasiveness that veterans listen to. (38 Robertson Road, Pueblo, CO 81001-1770.)

Kathy Shewey
A staff developer with expertise in teaming, advisory programs, and teaching with learning centers in the inclusive middle school classroom. (5714 Southwest 36th Way, Gainesville, FL 32601. Telephone: 904-378-7167.)

Anne Wheelock
Through the efforts of the Clark Foundation and the MAC, Wheelock has amassed an array of resources useful for educators interested in the practical details of detracking, many of which are included in this book. (Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 95 Berkeley Street, Boston, MA 02116. Telephone: 617-357-8431.)

Quinn Wiggins
Spirited advocate of and trainer in cooperative learning in elementary and middle schools. (Assistant Principal, Mebane Middle School, Rte. 1, Box 1, Alachua, FL 32615. Telephone: 904-462-1648.)

Ron Williamson
A middle school supervisor for Ann Arbor, and involved in the successful transition away from the junior high school and ability grouping. (Ann Arbor Public Schools, 2555 S. State Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48104. Telphone: 313-994-2244.)

Paula Young
A staff developer for Orange County Schools, and an expert in consultation and co-teaching. (778 Balsa Drive, Altamonte Springs, FL 32714. Telphone: 407-849-3230.)

Sarah Zemlo, Bob Carroll, Bev Jones
Classroom teachers who make the reading/writing workshop approach come alive in the 6th grade. (Fort Clarke Middle School, 9301 Northwest 23rd Avenue, Gainesville, FL 32606. Telephone: 904-332-8050.)

Organizations

As with people, there are many organizations that can serve as resources for the school leader seeking assistance in moving away from rigid ability grouping. Here are a few.

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
ASCD has a decades-long commitment to diversity and many resources to support it. (1250 N. Pitt Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-1403. Telephone: 703-549-9110. FAX 703-549-3891.)

The National Middle School Association
Middle school people tend, as a group, to be innovative and child-centered, and NMSA can help you find resources and people to help you. (4807 Evanswood Drive, Columbus, OH 43229. Telphone: 614-848-8211.)

The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented
First and foremost advocates for the gifted and talented, members of the NRCGT are open, some are eager, to find a common ground in school programs where excellence and equity can coexist. Strong commitment to research and exploration of school and classroom strategies that can work effectively in inclusive classrooms and schools. (The University of Connecticut, School of Education, U-64, Storrs, CT 06269-2007. Telephone: 203-486-4031.)

National Resource Center for Middle Grades Education
Has a group of staff developers, with skill in working with diversity, second to none in the nation. (College of Education, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL 33620. Telephone: 813-974-2530.)

Southeastern Desegregation Assistance Center
A group with a decades-long experience with and commitment to educational equity and the willingness to help districts who share the same commitment. (Kendall One Plaza, 8603 S. Dixie Highway, Suite 304, Miami, FL 33143. Telephone: 305-669-0114.)

Massachusetts Advocacy Center
Specially interested in the schools of Boston, their work has far wider applicability, particularly recent publications on tracking and ability grouping. (95 Berkeley Street, Boston, MA 02116. Telephone: 617-357-8431.)

New England League of Middle Schools
A wealth of resources, even a regular conference on heterogeneous grouping. (460 Boston Street, Suite #4, Topsfield, MA 01983-1223.)

Accelerated Schools Project
Focuses on an index of factors likely to make it possible for "those who have fallen behind to work faster than their peers." (School of Education, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-3084. Telephone: 415-725-1676.)

Yale Child Study Center
Helps schools develop comprehensive plans for success with at-risk students. (320 S. Frontage Road, New Haven, CT 06510. Telephone: 203-785-2548.)

The Efficacy Institute
Special interest in helping school-age youth in areas of self-esteem and school success. (99 Hayden Street, Lexington, MA 02173. Telephone: 617-862-4390.)

TESA: Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement
Time-tested staff development based on solid research on teacher expectations. (23965 Minnequa Drive, P.O. Box 5738, Diamond Bar, CA 91765. Telephone: 714-598-7561.)

Project Zero
Information and research on the concept of multiple intelligence and varieties of giftedness. (Longfellow Hall, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA, 02138. Telephone: 617-495-4342.)

Pioneer Regional School
Publisher of *The Pioneering Practitioner*, a new teacher journal on heterogeneous ability grouping, cooperative learning, and related issues. New subscribers welcomed. (Pioneer Regional School, F. Summer Turner Drive, Northfield, MA 01360.)

National Council for Teachers of Mathematics
Dramatic new initiatives in mathematics education, much of it compatible with the inclusive classroom. (1906 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22090. Telephone: 703-620-9840.)

Edna McConnell Clark Foundation
Resources committed to the education of at-risk students. (250 Park Avenue, Suite 900, New York, NY 10177-0026. Telephone: 212-986-4558.)

National Center on Education and the Economy
Publishes a number of useful studies and documents. (39 State Street, Suite 500, Rochester, NY 14614. Telephone: 716-546-3145.)

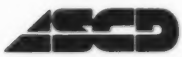
Resource Center on Educational Equity
The equity arm of the organization of the state directors of education. (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Suite 700, Washington, DC 20001. Telephone: 202-408-5505.)

How to Untrack Your School

If we are to offer *all* students equity and excellence, we "must envision an inclusive school in which all students are deemed worthy and capable of learning everything the school has to teach."

In *How to Untrack Your School*, Paul George takes a practical look at the issues surrounding tracking—the ways that schools, for a variety of reasons, group students homogeneously for instruction. Recognizing that tracking is a barrier to fairness and diversity in our classrooms, George also understands that it cannot simply be eliminated. He explains the disadvantages and a few advantages of ability grouping and describes successful alternatives, change strategies, and implementation plans. He concludes by offering a list of both pro- and anti-tracking references and a roster of people and organizations readers can contact for information and assistance.

Paul George is Professor of Education in the Department of Educational Leadership, College of Education, University of Florida, Gainesville.



Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

ASCD is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, international education association with headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia. Founded in 1943, ASCD is committed to the mission of developing leadership for quality in education for all students.